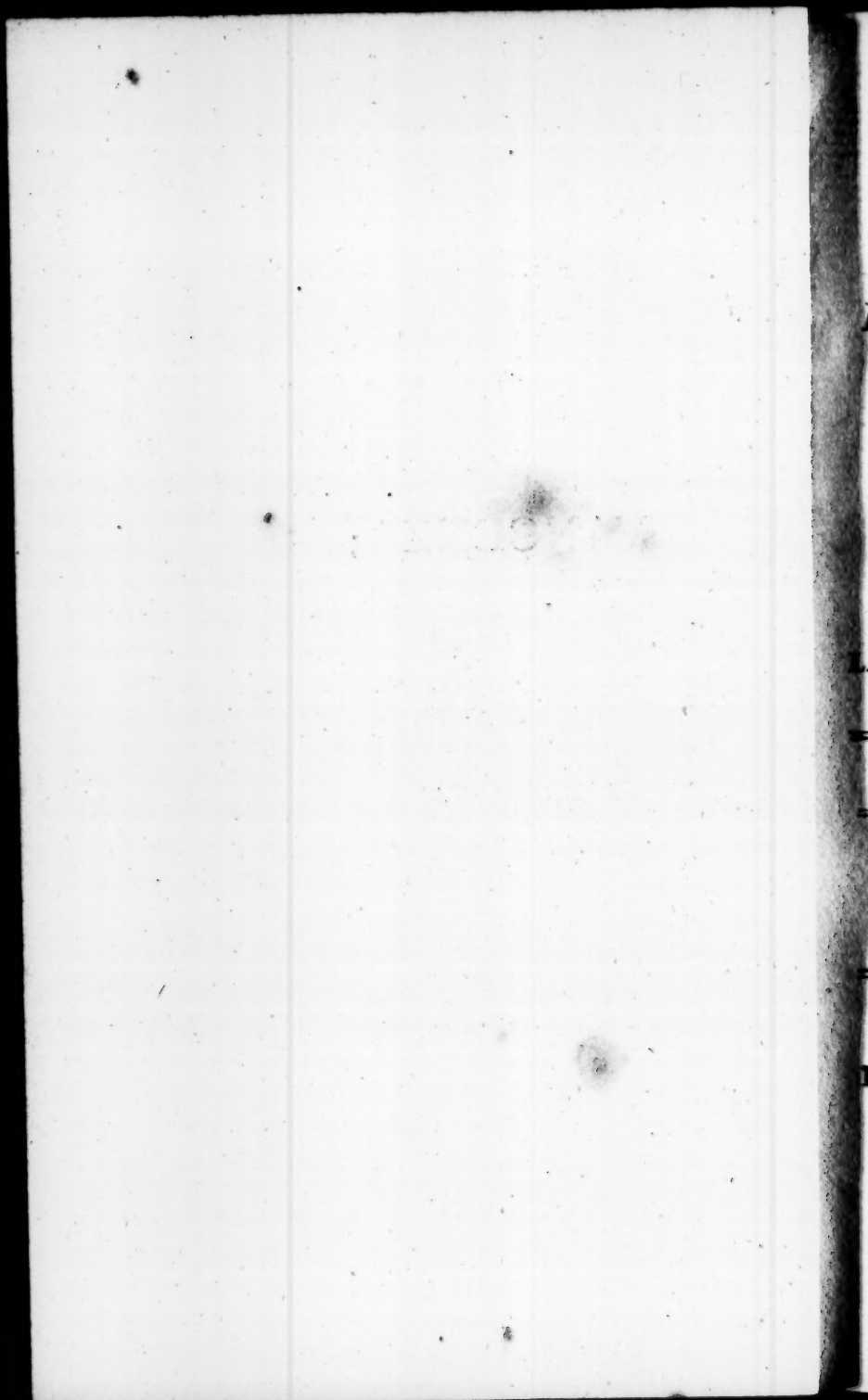

VANCENZA;

OR THE

DANGERS OF CREDULITY,

A MORAL TALE.



VANCENZA;

OR, THE

DANGERS OF CREDULITY;

A MORAL TALE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. M. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF THE POEMS OF

LAURA MARIA, AINSI VA LA MONDE, a MONODY
to the MEMORY of SIR J. REYNOLDS, &c. &c.

“Be wary then: best SAFETY lies in FEAR.”

SHAKSPERE.

VOLUME I.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

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M DCC XCHII.



DEDICATION

FOR THE FOURTH EDITION.

TO THE PUBLIC.

THE demand for the FOURTH EDITION of the following little Tale, within the space of six months, is too flattering a proof of liberal patronage, to be passed over in silence: That my heart is sensible of the repeated instances of public favour with which I have been honoured, cannot be doubted; that, to merit a distinction so gratifying shall be the study of my life, will, I trust, be believed. When I had the honour of submitting my Poems to the indulgent eye of a discerning Public, the protection they received, and the warm approbation they met with from the REVIEWERS, encouraged me to attempt a new species of Literature. I lament that VANCENZA was only the work of a few days; for had I conceived it would have been so favoured, in its progress through the critical world, I should have endeavoured to render it of more consequence, and more deserving of public patronage.

MARY ROBINSON.

St. James's-Place,
Sept. 9, 1792.

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VANCENZA.

CHAPTER I.

UPON the side of a beautiful forest, sheltered from the northern blasts by a chain of mountains, bordered with trees, the growth of many centuries, rising above a canopy of luxuriant foliage, the gilded vanes of Vancenza glistened to the eye of the far-distant traveller—while the lofty turrets cast their long shadows across an extensive lake, that partly over-spread the neighbouring valley.

The towering precipice, from whose dizzy height the fearful shepherd gazed with terror and asto-

nishment, hung over its woody skirts tremendously sublime ; while down its winding paths the rushing torrents scattered their white foam, sometimes lost in unseen channels, at others dividing in small currents towards the lake beneath !

So wild, so romantic a spot, seemed rather the work of enchantment, than the earthly habitation of any thing mortal ! the harmonious warblings of the feathered minstrels ; the murmuring sound of intermingling streams ; the lulling moan of the confined breezes, amidst the flint-rooted pines, that waved their tall heads, rocking their callow tenants in leafy cradles ; the verdant glades, here and there opening to the skies, and scattered over with sheep and wild goats ; the adjacent

hills hanging their dark brows over a vast sheet of quivering water ; presented a scene so magnificent, so abstracted from the busy world, that the beholder's heart thrilled with delicious transport, harmonized by the sublime sensations of enchanting melancholy.

The Castle of Vancenza had been built in the beginning of the Twelfth Century ; the structure consisted of a spacious court-yard, encircled with a vast pile of architecture of the most exquisite order ; at each corner a lofty tower commanded a variety of luxuriant prospects ; the front facing the lake was raised upon an invulnerable rampart, whose ivy-covered battlements formed a beautiful and extensive terrace ; the southern aspect presented innumerable ave-

nues cut through the venerable forest, which led to the boundaries of Old Castile. The northern view was terminated by mountains grandly romantic ; the valley beyond the lake led to a verdant opening of some miles in length, revealing at once a thousand undescribable and fascinating attractions!——

The numberless small cottages besprinkled in the vicinity of the castle, bespoke the hospitality of its lord ; the happiness and good fellowship of the rustics conferred a degree of lustre on his name, that idle ostentation might have blushed to behold ; while he enjoyed in this secluded paradise, that health and tranquility of mind, which is rarely found in the palaces of the most splendid cities.

The noble owner of this extensive domain lived in the Fifteenth Century ; he was the last male heir of an ancient and honourable family. The Count Vancenza had, in his early days, been as highly celebrated for feats of chivalry, as for the most finished graces both of mind and person.—He had distinguished himself in the service of his country, and still bore about him many glorious scars, obtained in the field of honourable warfare! But, grown grey in the exercise of valour, he now turned his thoughts to more humble scenes of emulation ; the same arm that had defended the rights of his countrymen, was now stretched forth with undiminished zeal, in the gentler offices of domestic philanthropy! He had passed, with dauntless intrepidity, through

all the thorny mazes of precarious life, and was now stealing to the vale of undisturbed repose, where he might enjoy the delightful retrospect of an unsullied journey. The evening of age, to a virtuous man, is calm and unclouded ; he sinks into the grave, like a setting sun, adorned with tempered lustre, directing his course to that goal, from whence he may rise again with renovated splendour !

In this blest asylum, amidst the consoling assiduities of domestic attachment, sated with the sickening blandishments of public life—the venerable Count had, for sixteen years, enjoyed the recompence of an honourable service ; without once emerging from his retreat, or entertaining a single wish to rove

beyond its boundaries. His family consisted of the Marchioness de Vallorie, his sister; the Countess Carline, her daughter; Elvira, a young and beautiful maiden, who from her infancy had been educated in the castle, with all the care and respect due to an illustrious orphan; and a numerous train of domestics, many of whom had grown old and feeble in the service of their master, and were like him, declining to the narrow pallet of eternal repose.

The Count Vancenza, who new no delight equal to that of bestowing happiness—dedicated all his hours to the pleasure and improvement of his young companions. He had neither the peevishness of age, nor the austere affectation of wisdom and experience. He was all be-

nignity! for he well knew that the youthful mind, like the sweet blossoms of an early spring, requires a mild and fostering hand to wake it to perfection. The smallest bud, that finds a shelter from the boisterous elements, expands its silken leaves, replete with odours!—while the strong oak, that spreads its broad arms to the biting blast, awaits the glowing season in naked poverty.

Sometimes, encircled by his beautiful family, he called forth their attention, by the recital of his early feats of martial prowess; the dangers of the field, the shouts of victory, and the groans of slaughtered heroes, were pictured in the most affecting language.—He watched the different sensations, in the

minds of his little auditors, and often kissed away the tear his tale extorted. At others, the tinsel joys and intricate intrigues of courtly scenes spread over their rosy cheeks the flush of indignation. Nor did the changes and perplexities of the softer passion escape his animadversion ; he had felt its pangs, he had regretted its delights ; he had drank poison from the eye of beauty, and his heart had bled with the worst wound of keen ingratitude. He was a deep researcher into the human mind, and had made his way through all the winding labyrinths of which it is composed. But his fine sense of honour made him scrupulously nice ; he discriminated with the contracted eye of prejudice ; judging mankind, in general, by his idea of what they *ought* to be, rather

than yielding to a conviction of what they *are*.

Elvira, who had been the darling of the Count, from the playful dawn of infantine simplicity to the expanded noon of cultivated youth, had experienced every advantage that knowledge could bestow, or virtue inculcate ; her mind had readily received the fullest impressions of both, and now presented a finished model of perfection. She knew no wish, but that of her protector and his amiable sister, the Marchioness de Vallorie. The lively Carline, who was two years older than Elvira, had been her only juvenile companion ; they had received the same education cherished the same sentiments, and cultivated the same pursuits ; they shone like twin con-

stellations, borrowing transcendent lustre from each other's brightness.

The Marchioness de Vallorie was still in the prime of life; she had scarcely attained her thirty-seventh year; and, with the advantages of fine health, and a beautiful person, was still what may be called a lovely woman.

Her figure was gracefully majestic, her countenance rather commanding than delicate; yet there beamed from her large dark eyes, a brilliancy rarely found even in the glowing zenith of juvenile beauty; she was highly accomplished, her heart was the seat of unaffected virtue, and her understanding so enlightened by perpetual attention to study, that she had attained a degree of

classical knowledge, seldom acquired, except in the retired seminaries of scholastic severity.

She had been educated in the earlier part of her life in the gloom of a monastery ; her charms, accidentally seen upon a public religious ceremony, captivated the affections of the Marquis de Vallorie, a Neapolitan of high birth, fine talents, and exquisite sensibility.

The few years of domestic bliss she experienced in this union, passed away like the faint glories of a wintry sun over a dark and clouded hemisphere ; for they were transient, and soon overwhelmed by the frowns of capricious fortune.

The Marquis was brave, accom-

plished, and amiable ; but the vivacity of youth, and the delicate sense of propriety that governed every sentiment of his heart, often led him into situations, which wisdom cherished by philosophy, can only avoid, and honour shudders to endure.

In a moment of convivial harmony, an unguarded expression provoked a personal insult from a man of equal birth, high spirit, and revengeful nature ; custom overpowered the milder dictates of philanthropy, and the rigid laws of honour authorised the horrors of a legal assassination.

They met upon the borders of Tuscany ; a false pride prevented a conciliatory explanation on either side ; all the dear ties of friendship

were rent asunder ; the fiend of revenge panted for blood ; the Marquis de Vallorie fell the victim of his own rashness.

His amiable widow, with her then infant daughter, the Countess Caroline, separated for ever, by the mischiefs of a barbarous *etiquette* from him she had loved almost to idolatry, immediately quitted Naples. Her widowed heart sickened at the glare of splendour that surrounded her ; every scene of delight served only to remind her of her lost husband. The specious enjoyments of the world fade before the loathing eye of pensive sorrow ; and, next to the delight of social intercourse, the feeling mind enjoys the exquisite gratification of undisturbed and cherished regret : memory retraces the progres-

sive raptures of the past, while sensibility, in all the luxury of wo, compares it with the present ; the very shadow of receding happiness is consolatory ; we look back upon it as the pilgrim views the last tints of closing light, with the exhilarating hope that it will return again to guide him on his journey of affliction.

After passing a few tedious months in the vicinity of Naples, and arranging the pecuniary affairs of her deceased lord, the amiable Marchioness, whose grief knew no abatement, but cherished by revolving days, had taken root in the deepest recesses of her heart, began to prepare for her departure from Italy. The Castle of Vancenza opened to her an asylum where she could rest secluded from

the world, and enjoy the protection of her respected brother.

The Count, who had recently fixed his abode in that sweet elysium, was delighted with the prospect of his sister's society. Upon her arrival, he welcomed her with the gratulations of unfeigned affection ; and the little Elvira embraced her knees with the artless warmth of untutored fondness.

From that hour she knew no mother but the Marchioness de Vallorie ; her origin, her rank, and even her family name, were to her unknown ; she found herself, at the first dawn of reason, the darling of the Count, the pupil of his sister, the companion of Carline, and the object of universal adoration in the Castle she

inhabited: the rustics in the neighbouring forest dedicated their annual festivities to their little idol, whom, in their enthusiastic regard, they had named **THE ROSE OF VANCENZA**.

Elvira had just attained her fifteenth year: her form was the animated portrait of her mind; truth, benignity, pure and unstudied delicacy, the meekness of sensibility and the dignity of innate virtue, claimed the esteem; while the exquisite beauty of her bewitching countenance captivated the heart of every beholder! She was tall, and finely proportioned! her complexion was neither the insipid whiteness of the lily-bosomed Circassian, nor the masculine shade of the Gallic brunette; the freshness of health glowed upon

her cheek, while the lustre of her dark blue eyes borrowed its splendour from the unsullied flame, that gave her mind the perfection of intellect! Her voice was mild as the cooings of the ring-dove; and her smile the gentle harbinger of tenderness and complacency!—She was every thing that fancy could picture, or conviction adore!—Perfection could go no further!

The Count Vancenza passed his declining hours in this delicious society, in a constant research after such pleasures as could delight the heart, and expand the reason of his lovely pupils; the guiltless mirth of village fetes, the sports of the chase, music, painting, and literature, were so judiciously blended, that study

became pleasure, and amusement never sunk into the torpid languor of satiety.

Elvira had acquired considerable eminence in the science of harmony ; her voice was the seraphic echo of her lute, whose chords spoke to the soul, under the magic touch of her skillful fingers. She was well acquainted with the works of the most celebrated French and Italian authors ; the beauties of Ariosto and Petrarch by turns captivated her heart ; she felt the force of their compositions, though she was a stranger to the sensations that inspired them. Happy Elvira ! who, nursed in the tranquil bosom of retirement, feared not the vicissitudes of fortune, or the corroding pangs of agonizing solicitude.

The twilight breezes had scarcely fanned the summit of the mountain, tinged with radiant light issuing from the eastern hemisphere, when the enlivening horn awoke the lovely Elvira from the innocent slumbers of repose: roused by the sound, she hastily adjusted her morning habiliments, and, flying to the apartment of Carline, summoned her to participate her pleasure. With eager haste they repaired to one of the lofty towers, from whose battlements they might take an extensive view of the surrounding country.

The sounds approaching with redoubled echoes from the neighbouring hills, they soon discovered thro' the brakes in the forest, a numerous train of horsemen, eagerly engaged in

the dangerous pursuit of the wild boar. They advanced nearer to the castle; the sportsmen, from the extraordinary splendour of their accoutrements, appeared to be of very superior rank: their glittering spears glanced undulating rays of sparkling light through the brown foliage of the venerable vistas; the sun shot forth resplendent glories, and the soft southern breezes almost seemed to sleep on the smooth bosom of the silvery waters!

The boar, enraged with frequent wounds, and foaming with thirst for eager vengeance, now turned upon his followers, and ploughing up the turf besmeared with blood, seemed to defy their threatening spears uplifted to assail him; when, on a sudden,

the exulting shouts and clamours of the hunters proclaimed the victory over the ferocious antagonist.

Elvira and Carline hastened to the Count's apartment, to inform him of the unusual scene to which they had been witnesses ; they had scarcely begun the recital, when a domestic, pale and trembling, presented himself abruptly before them. For some moments he lost the power of utterance, and his first accents were the accents of imploring calamity.

“ Help,” said the horror-stricken page, “ Help, I conjure you, a valiant young prince, who is approaching your castle, wounded, and I fear expiring.” The Count flew, with the eagerness that pity ever prompts, to

succour the unhappy ; at the outward gate he met the bleeding stranger, borne in the arms of two friends, whose afflicted countenances proclaimed the virtues of their illustrious associate. He was instantly conveyed to a lower apartment, and, surrounded by his train of attendants, laid upon a couch, pallid, and to all appearance lifeless.

Affliction seemed to prey on every bosom ; the tusks of the enraged animal had so lacerated his arm, that the excessive loss of blood had occasioned a temporary suspension of all sensation.

The lovely and tender Elvira, who stood like a weeping angel over the reliques of a martyred saint, raising

her fine eyes towards heaven in silent invocation, drew from her polished brow a veil of transparent lawn, and unmindful of the groupe that stood wondering at her beauty, began to bind it round the wound of the unfortunate stranger ; then, recollecting the impropriety she had been guilty of, in exposing her face to the prying eyes of so many strangers, burst into tears, and retired to a window at the farthest end of the apartment.

At this moment a knight, who knelt by the Prince's couch, observing a convulsive motion on his breast, that indicated sign of returning life, clasping his hands in an agony of transport, appealed to Heaven in the accents of supplication.

"Divine Omnipotence!" said he, "if virtue is thy care, rescue from the fangs of death its most illustrious patron! Oh, Almanza, my Prince, my friend, awake from this dream of oblivion, and afford some small degree of consolation to our anguish!"

The name of Almanza struck the Count Vancenza with the force of electricity: approaching with a mixture of agony and astonishment, as the big drop rolled down his aged cheek, he exclaimed, "Almanza! is it possible? Has Heaven spread this gleam of sunshine on my closing hour of transitory existence, by affording me a blessed opportunity of succouring the beloved son of my departed friend? Oh, my Prince, welcome, thrice welcome, to the abode of thy

servant, who respects in thee the virtues of thy father."—Then, knœeling by the couch where the Prince still lay under the cold pressure of exhausted nature, he continued to pour forth the anguish of his soul, sometimes in the loud exclamations of ungovernable sorrow, and, at others, in smothered tones, upon the bosom of his illustrious guest.

A laboured respiration now gladdened the anxious minds of the surrounding spectators; it was therefore judged expedient to remove the Prince to that end of the room where an open casement afforded a free circulation of air: the veil which Elvira had bound about the wound, and which was sufficiently ample to encircle the arm in a variety of folds,

had effectually stopped the effusion of blood ; the magic bandage was so powerfully impregnated with the most exquisite odours, that the returning sense, seizing upon their vivifying properties, in a few minutes experienced the delight of a perfect restoration.

The crimson fountain of life had scarcely spread its soft tints upon his pallid lip, when his languid eyes were fixed in speechless ecstasy on the countenance of Elvira, whose cheek met his gaze glowing and lovely, as the meek rose encounters the burning glances of the meridian sun ! Overpowered by his admiration, she was preparing to depart, when the Prince, fearful of losing the sight of so charming an object, in a feeble

voice, accompanied by the most impressive manner, entreated her to stay. "Beauteous lady!" said he, "if you are indeed a mortal, for your outward form bears the strong semblance of divinity, suffer me for a moment to enjoy the Elysium that presents itself before me: surely I am in the Castle of Enchantment, and you are the fair mistress of the air-built habitation! If my returning faculties do not deceive me, I awake from the shades of death to taste the supreme felicities of a terrestrial Paradise!" Then, raising himself on his couch, he stretched forth his trembling hand towards the good old Count, and added, "Venerable Sir, I am a stranger to your hospitable mansion; but if the Heavens should smile upon my fate,

the memory of your goodness shall never be effaced." Then, looking round with eager apprehension, he enquired for his friend the Duke del Vero.

The Duke had been employed in sending dispatches to Madrid, for the best assistance; and in writing letters to the Prince's particular friends, acquainting them of the alarming accident which had happened. He entered the apartment at the moment the Prince was enquiring after him; the sound of his voice vibrated on the heart-strings of Del Vero, conveying more delight than the seraphic chords of heavenly harps to the enraptured ears of dying saints! His joy was unutterable; it was of that sort, which no pen can describe,

and few minds are capable of conceiving !

Carline, during this scene of solicitude, had been employed in the amiable assiduities of filial affection with the Marchioness de Vallorie ; who, upon the first appearance of the wounded Prince, had fainted, and had been conveyed to her chamber in the most alarming state of agitation.

CHAPTER II.

THE physician, who was now arrived from Madrid with astonishing expedition, was ushered into the room where the Prince lay, extremely languid and exhausted. He examined the wound, and in a few minutes, to the heartfelt joy of every hearer, pronounced it to be of no very dangerous appearance. As it was past midnight, he recommended repose to his patient, and earnestly requested that he might be permitted, with one domestic, to attend him for the next eight hours.

It was with some difficulty that the Count Vancenza could be prevailed upon to retire ; but the absolute necessity of the measure at length conquered his zeal, and, after taking an affectionate leave of the Prince, his next object was that of evincing his hospitality.

The company now assembled in the saloon, where supper was provided for their refreshment. The Marchioness remained in her chamber, on account of indisposition. Elvira presided as hostess of the mansion, and the lively Carline contributed, by her unaffected *gaite de cœur*, to the general hilarity of the night : the joy which prevailed on the happy change in the Prince's situation, protracted the hour of

separation, until the dawn of day cast its blue mantle over the neighbouring hills. They retired to their several apartments ; not without first inquiring, with tender anxiety, how the Prince had passed the night.

The Duke del Vero, whose silent admiration had been observed by every one present except Elvira, whose beauty had inspired it, sought in vain for repose ; the impression her form and manner had made upon his mind banished the influence of sleep. The tender passion, when it takes root in stern and violent natures, like the raging of a fever in the strongest constitution, becomes more fatal from the force that opposes it, and, perpetually fed by its own fire, frequently consumes the object it encounters.

After passing an hour in restless rumination, the broad beams of light, penetrating through his curtains, roused him from his lethargy of thought: he started from his pillow, feverish and dejected, and, scarcely knowing whether he bent his way, passed through the long gallery which opened to the terrace facing the lake. The sun diffused its most splendid glories over the grateful bosom of the humid earth: the wild fowl hovering over the glittering water, sweeping its lucid surface with their variegated wings; the soft music of the mountain breezes; the hollow sound of falling cascades; the distant precipice still hiding its blue head amidst the severing clouds, that floated in feathery folds before the breath of morning; the flocks and herds bounding and frisking along the

verdant openings on the side of the valley; the intermingling notes of woodland melody presented a picture so exquisitely sublime, that Del Vero, fascinated with delight, forgot for a moment even the graces of Elvira.

“All beauteous Nature!” exclaimed he, “how extensive, how luxuriant are thy enchantments! Every thing that can harmonise the soul, or gratify the sense, presents itself in this delightful solitude! Here the mourner, MAN, may behold and enjoy an earnest of celestial happiness: why then should he turn from the proffered bounties of his Creator, and idly prodigal of the blessings destined for his use, seek in the turbulent mazes of busy life, and the duplicity of courts, for gratifications fatal to his repose, and pleasures that must inevitably

lead to satiety and remorse? Alas! how often do we behold the vigour of youth wasted in intemperance, leaving only the misery of repentance to prey upon its hopeless victim! The mind that has neglected a proper degree of cultivation, when it possessed the powers of receiving it, will find no resource that can supply the vacuum, when pain, disease, and sorrow augment the miseries of age. How burthensome must life become, when the only hope of a release from the corroding pangs of self-reproach, rests in the melancholy but welcome prospect of eternal oblivion!

“ When I behold yon bleak and dreary mountain rearing its barren brow above the misty atmosphere, the destined sport of every warring element, I think of the ambitious

tyrant, who lifted above the quiet paths of life, stands exalted in wretched superiority, surrounded with dangers, and exposed to all the storms and whirlwinds of tempestuous life ; while the unassuming Philanthropist, gifted with all the enviable endowments of the heart, retires from vulgar adulation, and, like the low but fertile valley, diffuses blessings round him ; and, sheltered from the miseries of greatness, enjoys that luxury which wealth could never purchase !”

Such were Del Vero's reflections, when the clock from the corner turret reminded him of the hour when probably the family were assembled : with a slow and melancholy pace he sauntered along the terrace, and upon entering the hall was met by Elvira and Carline.

The decent attire of a secluded life gave additional graces to their lovely forms. They were both simply elegant, and delicately neat. Elvira wore a petticoat of white satin, with a jacket of the palest green; her auburn tresses were confined in luxuriant braids, and intermingled with bands of pearls, over which the witching hand of modesty had thrown an ample veil of white gauze, which hung in folds below her slender waist. Carline's dress was exactly similar in fashion, only varying in colour, which was of the brightest lilac.

They saluted the Duke with the curtesy of unaffected politeness, and requested his attendance at breakfast.

CHAPTER III.

THE Count Vancenza, surrounded by his noble guests, welcomed the lovely girls with his usual morning benediction, and placing one on each side his chair, united with them in those attentions that convince the mind how little the glare of ostentation resembles the genuine effusions of intuitive munificence.

The table was liberally supplied, without idle profusion ; health gave a zest to appetite, and temperance presided over the liberal distributions of nature. The most delicious fruits gave additional relish to the purest

produce of the vineyard, while cheerful smiles and lively conversation evinced the satisfaction of every one present. At the conclusion of the repast, Elvira entertained the company with her lute, and inspired every heart with rapture by the melody of her voice: every note conveyed to the ear the dulcet accents of celestial harmony! such sounds as touch the soul, while the laboured distortions of scientific skill awaken astonishment without the power to captivate.

Three days glided away in a variety of amusements, when the physician pronounced his patient sufficiently recovered to bear the exercise of travelling. A litter, commodiously arranged for the purpose, being in readiness to convey him to Madrid, the Prince, impatient to acknowledge the kind-

ness of his host, was led to the great hall, where his companions were already waiting to attend him.

Almanza had just arrived at the twenty-first year of his age ; his person was graceful and majestic ; his features manly, regular, and sedate ; his countenance, though grave, bore not the smallest trait of severity. His eyes, beaming with sensibility, were over-arched by brows as dark as ebony ; his hair, which was glossy as the chesnut, hung in graceful ringlets on his finely-falling shoulders. He wore the habit of the chase : it was composed of scarlet cloth, bordered with sable : on his cloak a brilliant star distinguished him from his companions ; his hat was of black velvet, decorated with a plume of feathers of the most beautiful quality and unspotted whiteness.

He approached the venerable Count with the warmth of affection and the delicacy of respect. An enlightened mind, next to the pleasure of receiving, enjoys the supreme delight of conferring happiness. The Count embraced him with the tenderness of a father. The Prince looked like a divinity ; something more than mortal diffused animation over his face ! he took the Count's hand and pressed it to his heart ; the involuntary action spoke more forcibly to the feelings than all the eloquence of the most studied language ! Virtue never appears to greater advantage than when it is employed in the dignified exercise of gratitude.—After a pause of some moments : “ I cannot depart,” said the Prince, “ without paying due homage to this noble family.” Then, turning towards Elvira : “ To you,

madam," added he, "I owe my restoration—to your magic veil, which I swear to consecrate as the sacred relique of virtuous humanity, I am indebted for what I now feel. I will guard it as my proudest treasure; and if ever I forget its beauteous mistress, may the misery of contempt be the reward of my ingratitude." Then, bowing respectfully to the Marchioness and Carline, he acquainted his attendants that he was ready to depart.

The exchange of mutual civilities engaged the company, as they passed through the antique apartments of the castle, until they arrived at the outward gate, where they separated, the Prince's equipage moving slowly along the forest.

Elvira, whose gentle bosom, for the first time, felt the pang of separation from a beloved object, unobserved by the rest of the family retired to her chamber, and opening the lattice with tearful eyes and a palpitating heart, followed the cavalcade, until the objects, lessening to the view, at length diminished to a mass of moving atoms, scarcely perceptible ; except when the setting sun caught the polish of their shining accoutrements, and reflected a dazzling glance of transitory lustre. Elvira remained at the window till the shades of night hung over the outstretched landscape : the last sound of Almanza's voice was still vibrating upon her brain, when the evening bell summoned her to supper.

Carline, whose vivacity was proof against every attack upon the heart,

rallied her friend upon the solemnity of her manner: the Count, who knew the human mind, and had traced the passions through all its intricate mazes, observed with silent concern the pearly drop of sorrow that hung upon the down-cast eye, spangling its fringed lid with the gem of sensibility; he felt that the refined soul shrinks from the coarse gaze of prying curiosity: he trembled to offend, he dreaded to be convinced——he was silent.

Elvira rose from the table; she caught the eye of Carline, and smiled: it was the smile of self-reproach, rather than that of an unruffled mind. The Count, observing her embarrassment, retired to rest. Elvira, released from her perplexing situation, repaired to her chamber: an involuntary sensation led her to the lat-

tice ; she opened it, and, recollecting that it was no longer the sweet hour of placid twilight, blushed at her folly, and began to divest herself of her day apparel. She enveloped her fair form in a robe of muslin, and, binding an embroidered handkerchief about her head, took up her lute and began to sing a melancholy air, adapted to the words of her favourite Petrarch.

She approached the window. The moon was just risen above the trees of the forest, tipping their waving heads with silvery lustre ; the nightingale echoed harmonious warblings to the tones of her instrument. The casement opened to a long balcony, that overlooked the rampart facing the avenue. All was serene ; the transparent clouds were borne upon the wings of silent winds along the

vast expanse. The quivering leaves reflecting their shadows upon the openings between the trees, pictured to the pensive eye of the fair mourner a thousand fastastic forms and airy visions. Her fingers forgot their office, and her cold hand rested in languid inactivity upon the chords of her lute. The clock proclaimed the witching hour of midnight: the solemn sound awed her into profound attention, when, on a sudden, she distinctly heard a kind of rustling among the trees, and at the same moment she perceived the figure of a man, wrapped in a white cloak, the front of which was ornamented with shining clasps; his pace was quick, but at times hesitating. She was almost petrified with fear and astonishment, when the stranger, advancing as near as the situa-

tion permitted, in an empassioned tone, thus addressed her :

“ If thou art not a phantom, formed by the fond imagination of love to cheat my eyes with the semblance of Elvira, oh ! strike again the strings of heavenly harmony, and, by their magic softness, sooth a mind distracted and despairing.

Elvira, terrified by this extraordinary and unexpected salutation, hastened from the balcony, without making any answer. She passed the night in melancholy reflections ; fancy gave to her view all the perfections of Almanza ; she reproached herself for not having replied to his empassioned address, and frequently opened the casement, in hopes that he still remained beneath the walls

of the castle. At length, when every eye awoke to greet the morning, hers, fatigued and languid, closed to short-lived slumbers. Even in her dreams the image of the Prince assailed her ; she thought he presented her the portrait of a lady, holding in her hand a bleeding heart. She traced a strong resemblance between the features of the picture and her own : she was preparing to receive it, when the colours suddenly faded, and the paleness of death overspread the countenance ! She awoke in the most violent perturbation. In a few minutes Caroline came laughing into her chamber, and, finding her drest at so early an hour, made a thousand inquiries concerning the cause of so unusual a circumstance.

Elvira, feigning a slight indisposition, requested leave to remain alone till the hour of dinner. The Marchioness endeavoured, by every affectionate attention, to divert and sooth her. The kindness she received only served to increase her melancholy. Solitude is the best medicine for the afflicted heart: to indulge in the dear luxury of grief is the peculiar privilege of an enlightened soul ; it feeds upon its sorrows, and shuns, with timid caution, the taunting eye of general commiseration.

There is something humiliating in the voice of pity, that the proud mind cannot endure. Elvira dreaded the discovery of her weakness, because she knew it would subject her to contempt and ridicule: to cherish an

absurd and childish passion, to feed the fond imagination upon the delusive charm of flattering hope, where not a single prospect of success presented itself to her dispassionate reflections, could be productive of nothing but shame and mortification ! Such were the lessons of reason : let the gravest philosopher ask his own heart, how far such theory corresponds with the dictates of nature.

She resolved to deposit the fatal secret in the hidden recesses of her bosom, and to await the event in haughty silence.

Several days passed in painful anxiety : the agitation of her spirits began to settle in a cold despondency ; she seldom joined in conversation at table, and at the end of every meal retired to her apartment.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Marchioness and Carline, whose affection participated every change in the sentiments of Elvira, observed with infinite concern the visible uneasiness she laboured under. The usual occupations of music and reading now appeared to disgust her. The rustic fetes of the neighbouring villages, the sprightly dance, the sportive gambols, in which she was wont to join the gayest of the throng, now pleased no more!—Her eye loathed the very scenes on which it once fed with delight ; she was pensive and mournful ; yet dejection cast such irresistible softness over

her countenance, that it appeared more interesting than the loveliest glow of rapture could have made it. Frequently did she wander about the forest, like one disordered in her senses, gathering wild flowers, and weaving them into a thousand varying forms: sometimes she would sing, at others weep, unmindful of those who were observing her.

The Marchioness, having exhausted every plan of entertainment ineffectually, proposed making little morning excursions to the different ages in the forest of Vancenza. They left the castle, and rambling about for some time, stopped at the small but neat habitation of an old woman, who had been for many years supported by the family. The visitors were received with the un-

feigned smiles of grateful exultation. the venerable Ursiline led them through every chamber of her homely habitation, then placed before them the produce of her narrow establishment, while her heart welcomed them with fervent benedictions.

Elvira observed, that as the day was remarkably fine, the rustic repast would be doubly refreshing if enjoyed in the open air ; she proposed that the table should be removed to the side of a mossy bank, beneath a large oak, opposite the door of the cottage. They approached the rural seat, when her eyes were fascinated by the characters of her name, recently engraved upon the bark, she was overwhelmed with confusion and dread, lest her companions should discover the cause of her

blushes. To the lover, every little event, every proof of remembrance, is cherished as a source of secret delight, which loses its value by being exposed to vulgar participation.

They seated themselves upon the green sod, beneath the spreading canopy of interwoven branches. To *entertain* her guests, the old woman began a history of her *own* misfortunes. " 'Tis now upwards of forty years," said she, "since I first came to the forest. My good man, Heaven rest his soul! was steward to the late Count Vancenza; he scraped together a small pittance, which was meant to support me and my poor son: we were as happy as the day was long; we rose with the lark to honest labour, and our nights were blessed with uninterrupted repose. But the

pleasures of this world are transitory : my good man died, and I had nothing left to comfort me but my son.”—“ I hope he is still alive to console you,” said Elvira.—“ Heaven only knows,” resumed Ursiline ; the boy was of a violent and restless disposition : I never could prevail upon him to assist his father in the field or the vineyard. ’Tis now fourteen years since he left me, and I have never heard what became of him.”——“ Alas !” said Elvira, “ I never knew a mother ; yet, I am convinced, my heart would have been rent to pieces, before I could have left any thing so dear to it. I could almost arraign the justice of Providence in depriving me of what I should have valued more than my existence ; while a wretch, like this poor woman’s son, possessed a blessing he knew not how to cherish.”

The hour of noon advancing, they prepared to return to the castle. the old Ursiline accompanied them part of the way: Elvira, every now and then, turning with wishful gaze towards the tree that bore the mysterious record of remembrance.—

Fancy whispered that Almanza was its author, and hope conspired to favour the flattering delusion.—She once thought of going back to satisfy her curiosity, when prudence suggested the impropriety of such a step, and she listened to its dictates. The evening's recreation finished with music. Elvira sung several little ballads, with an unusual air of vivacity. Every countenance was enlivened by this change in her disposition.

Several days passed in rural ex-

cursions : sometimes the noontide hour was wasted in angling under the reclining trees upon the border of the lake ; at others, the fair rambblers amused themselves in weaving wreathes of flowers, to decorate the doors of the neighbouring cottages ; each of which they had named after some castle or palace celebrated in the romances of their language.—

Elvira, by these innocent occupations, vainly endeavoured to divert her thoughts from the memory of Almanza : but his image was ever present to her bewildered fancy ; his name was frequently articulated amidst involuntary sighs, and her sleepless nights were consumed in perplexing meditations.

Three weeks elapsed since Almanza's departure, when, retiring at the

usual hour to her chamber, she thought she heard the tinklings of a guitar beneath her window ; she listened attentively, but the sound was vanished. She opened the casement : but how different was the scene from that which had presented itself upon a former occasion ! all was dark and dreary ; the atmosphere cold and turbid ; not a glimmering star shot forth its feeble rays through the thick clouds that hovered over the forest. The screech-owl, hid within her solitary dwelling, pierced with her horrid shrieks the ear of night ; the winds moaned along the battlements, and the long windows rattled round the castle. She stood aghast : the wind blew the lattice together, and she remained in the balcony, unable to open it. The noise proved a signal to the incognito beneath. “ Beau-

teous Elvira" said he, "again your slave presumes to trouble you ; if pity inhabits your pure bosom, attend to the voice of my despair ; receive the vows of him that adores you ; accept the heart of your Almanza. At the break of day I will wait at the cottage of Ursiline to ratify the vows of eternal constancy : if you refuse to meet my wishes, the accents of my misery shall trouble you no more."

Elvira could scarcely support her trembling frame : night's sable curtain hid her blushes : and in a timid, faltering voice, she replied, "Amiable Prince, she to whose happy destiny your generous heart may be allotted, should not disgrace the triumphs of her conquest, by any act of childish indiscretion : be confident of

my regard ; but remember, she who loses herself in her own esteem, will never be worthy of Almanza's."

"And can you, Elvira," resumed he, "can you delight in the misery you have occasioned—Be it so: this is the last effort of my affection ; and, I trust, when the termination of my sufferings has released you from persecutions that are disgusting to you, memory will never reproach you for the sorrows of your victim."

He departed. She traced his figure along the avenue by the faint glimpses of the rising moon, till it was lost in the deep gloom of the embowering branches. She returned to her apartment, wretched and disconsolate.

CHAPTER V.

THE carol of the birds proclaimed the coming day: soothed by the whispers of insidious hope, Elvira, resolved to obey the summons, and stealing from her chamber, descended by a private staircase into the court-yard. The gates were already open, to admit the peasantry, who daily received their morning meal from the bounty of the Count Vancenza. She passed unobserved; she traversed the forest, scarcely knowing whither she was going, till she arrived at the well known tree, opposite the cottage of Ursiline.

Her heart beat high with hope and apprehension ; she hesitated, she listened, then tremblingly advancing towards the door, rested a moment beneath its canopy of vine and myrtle. The profound silence within, inspired her with a momentary courage ; she entered : on a bench, in the corner of the room, lay a white cloak ; she instantly recognized the silver clasps ; she took it up, was preparing to press it to her lips ; the sound of some one approaching startled her, and she let it fall upon the floor. Her tottering limbs just supported her to the door, she sunk upon the green sod at the threshold, and fainted. Short was this interval of deadened sensation ; in a few moments she recovered, and found herself supported by the aged Ursiline,

and beheld kneeling before her—the Duke del Vero !

Rage, indignation, shame, and self-reproach, for a while prevented her rising, till pride, roused by the spirit of insulted virtue, armed her with resentment ; when, collecting her scattered senses, she tore herself from the scene of humiliation, and, darting upon him a look of ineffable contempt, flew with lightning's swiftness towards Vancenza.

The Duke followed her, and arresting her flight, “ Quit me not, beautiful Elvira,” said he, “ the fraud that drew you hither was dictated by despair : I marked your eye, following with eager gaze the footsteps of Almanza : happy, envied Almanza ! were not thy heart devo-

despised *himself* for having been their dupe, and execrated *them* for having preyed upon his generosity.

So altered was every principle of his soul, that he even entertained serious thoughts of retiring to a monastery of Benedictine Friars, in the vicinity of Madrid ; but the dread that solitude would increase the corroding miseries of repentance, deterred him from putting his plan in execution.

The scene of domestic bliss he had witnessed, during his short residence at Vancenza, had filled his mind with abhorrence of the follies of public life. The delicious tranquillity, the harmonious coincidence of ideas, the congeniality of soul that subsisted in the abode of virtue, presented, in

contrast, the scenes to which he had long been accustomed : the comparison struck upon his heart ; he felt his own insignificance, and resolved immediately to travel, to forget Elvira, and to wean his mind from the follies that disgraced it.

It is much easier to sink into depravity, than to relinquish its paths for the pursuit of virtue : he dreaded the taunting sneers of his former associates, the sarcasms of vulgar minds, and the triumphs of those who had presumed to condemn his former conduct. Ridicule is the most powerful sting that folly can experience ; its wounds are deeper than those of reproach, and they have the additional and peculiar quality of being incurable.

Elvira, whose mind and accomplishments would have added splendour to the most illustrious rank, was still considered by Del Vero as an obscure orphan, perhaps the offspring of some low dependant, fostered by charity, ostentation, or caprice ; or still worse, the fruit of an illicit connection with some abandoned female.

—The noble house of Del Vero never could countenance such an alliance! These were his reflections, and he determined to travel.

CHAPTER VII.

ALMANZA, who was above the little sensations of prejudice, admired Elvira with just enthusiasm, and frequently took occasion to speak of her in the warmest terms of panegyric. The females of the Spanish court had employed every fascinating art to attach him, but the variegated wing of caprice had hitherto fanned his warm bosom, without ever kindling a flame about his heart. Never did he appear in the brilliant circle but the loud whispers of fulsome adulation disgusted and offended him; for true merit defies the honeyed tongue of flattery, as the

diamond mocks the fire of the consuming crucible.

The lofty walls of Vancenza no longer echoed with the song of the minstrel, or the convivial sounds of social felicity. Elvira's change of person and manner now deeply interested every part of the family. The Count sought in vain, by every stratagem, to discover the cause of her uneasiness; the Marchioness de Vallorie, who marked the hourly ravages of secret sorrow, employed every lenient power that friendship could suggest to divert her thoughts. But there are diseases of the mind, that time and reflection only can obliterate. In order to efface, if possible, the deep impression which some unknown event had made upon the heart of Elvira, an excursion to

Madrid was proposed by the Count, and arranged with all the expedition of attentive regard. Carline was delighted with the prospect before her: to mingle in the pleasures of the busy world had long been the wish of her heart ; she panted for the joys of conquest, and already fancied she had accomplished her desire. Her amiable mother, who had once shone the most resplendent star in the Neapolitan court, had frequently cautioned her young mind against the dangers by which such scenes were surrounded, and was now mortified to find herself, after a delicious seclusion of thirteen years, again under the painful necessity of exchanging the tranquil shades of Vancenza for the tasteless parade of splendid duplicity.

Elvira gave that kind of acquiescence to the scheme which is rather the effect of gratitude than inclination. To object to a plan, formed for no other purpose than the hope of restoring her to health and happiness, would have been both ungracious and indelicate.

Under this conviction, she had no step to take but that of a ready compliance with the affectionate proposal.

The day of departure arrived : the preparations were such as became the rank of the Lord of Vancenza. He was delighted with this new opportunity of conferring happiness, and the generosity of his heart was displayed with its accustomed splendour. Elvira, whose sorrow was not to be diverted by trivial pursuits,

prepared for the journey with tardy indifference ; and while Carline was employing her fertile imagination, in forming various plans of pleasure and amusement, she consoled herself by visiting every beloved apartment in the castle, within whose walls she had passed her happy hours of childish simplicity.

In pensive melancholy she seated herself at the window of the spacious gallery, that opened to the terrace, and turning her eyes towards the casement, through which she might once more contemplate the dear retreats of her playful years, the lake, the mountain, and the valley, she was struck, for the first time, with the following stanzas, written with a brilliant on the casement before her. The small panes of glass were

alternately painted in a variety of devices, which made it difficult to decypher the characters; each square containing a single stanza.—

The chilling gale that nipt the rose,
Now murmuring sinks to soft repose;
The shad'wy vapours sail away,
Upon the silv'ry floods of day;
Health breathes on every face I see,
But, ah! she breathes no more on ME!

The woodbine wafts its odours meek,
To kiss the rose's glowing cheek;
Pale twilight sheds her vagrant show'rs,
To wake Aurora's infant flow'rs:
May smiles on every face I see,
But, ah! she smiles no more on ME!

Perchance, when youth's delicious bloom
Shall fade unheeded in the tomb,
Fate may direct a daughter's eye
To where my mould'ring reliques lie;
And, touch'd by sacred sympathy,
That eye may drop a tear for ME!

Betray'd by love; of hope bereft;
No gentle gleam of comfort left;

Bow'd by the hand of sorrow low ;
No pitying friend to weep my wo :
Save her who spar'd by Heav'n's decree,
Shall live to sigh, and think on MEI

Oh ! I would wander where no ray
Breaks through the gloom of doubtful day ;
There would I court the wintry hour,
The ling'ring dawn, the midnight show'r ;
For cold and comfortless shall be
Each future scene—ordain'd for MEI

Something unfelt before seemed
to take possession of all her faculties ;
the tenderness of love, the sympathy
of sorrow, suffused the azure heralds
of her soul with tears of pity ! She
read the lines over and over with the
most earnest solicitude ; the throb-
bings of her heart told her they were
connected with some tale of wo, in
in which she bore a part ; she was tran-
scribing them in her pocket book.
when the Count awakened her atten-

tion by informing her that he waited for her. He observed the effect the verses had produced ; she started as he approached her, and timidly inquired whether he had ever remarked them.

The Count was much confused at this unexpected question ; but, recollecting himself, informed her, that he had often read them, and that they were written by a lady, who was as celebrated for her beauty, as for her fortitude under the most trying calamities. “ She was a near relation of mine,” added he.—“ Is she then DEAD ?” said Elvira, in the most earnest tone of voice.—“ Yes,” replied the Count, much agitated, “ she expired in this castle about fourteen years since.”——“ No longer ! Gracious Heaven !” resumed Elvira, still

fixing her eyes on the record of sorrow ; “ Would I had known her, I am certain I should have loved her.” The Count was relieved from this embarrassing situation by the Marchioness, who summoned them to depart. Carline was all vivacity, joy, and expectation ; but Elvira’s soul was absorbed in reflection :— with reluctance she quitted the window, and, without uttering a syllable, seated herself in the carriage which was to convey them to Madrid.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was that delightful season of the year, when Nature displays her richest foliage, and decorates the earth with a thousand enamelled gems, shook from the perfumed wings of blushing summer: the birds attuned their throats to the wild melodies of love: and the face of the creation glowed with exulting beauty; the vale was covered with sheaves of golden grain; and the sides of the sloping hills concealed by the rich mantle of the tawny vineyard: they passed through groves of citron and myrtle, intermingling with

thick clusters of pomegranates, forming a perpetual alcove, through which the rays of the sun could scarcely penetrate ! As evening advanced, the grey shadows of twilight stole over the valley ; while the burning orb, retiring to its western canopy, cast a crimson lustre over the acute summits of the distant mountains.

As they passed through the villages, the rustics thronged about them, with fruits and wines, the produce of their labour ; some presenting *bouquets* of roses, while others danced before them to the tinkling mandolin, or sung in uncouth strains the little ballads of the country. The old were commending, in stammering accents, the eager attentions

of the young, and all united in joyful acclamations, as the cavalcade moved gently forward.

They now arrived at a post-house in the valley. Elvira, fatigued with the excessive heat of the day, and the unusual confinement in a carriage, proposed stopping at the first convenient inn to enjoy the refreshment of a few hours sleep. The rest of the party readily acquiesced in the proposal. They inquired of an old peasant for the best habitation in the neighbourhood. He informed them, that at about half a league distant they might lodge in perfect safety, and procure every accommodation they required ; “ or,” added he, “ if you wish for a more noble mansion, you need only proceed to the top of the hill beyond

the vineyard, where you will find an hospitable reception at the castle of the Duke del Vero, a brave seigneur as any in Spain."——“ Does he at present reside there ?” said Elvira. “ Yes,” replied the peasant, “ The Duke is afflicted with a deep melancholy, and seldom ventures abroad ; he was, till very lately, the gayest and merriest man alive, but they say he is fallen in love with an Orphan, who is supported at the castle of Vancenza by the bounty of the old Count.” Carline bursting into a loud laugh, Elvira, overwhelmed with confusion, requested that they might proceed, without making any further inquiries.

It was totally dark before they reached the place of destination. A profound silence prevailed during

the rest of the evening ; and as soon as they arrived, Elvira made her excuses and retired to rest, leaving the party to ruminate on the adventures of the day.

The Count Vancenza now conceived that he had discovered the cause of Elvira's uneasiness, and that it most probably proceeded from some declaration of Del Vero's, not unpleasing to her, but that the dread of his displeasure, from the general character of the Duke, prevented her opening her mind upon the occasion.

The Count, by a courier dispatched to Madrid, previous to their journey, had provided a splendid mansion for the accommodation of his family. Every elegance, every lux-

ury, was prepared for the reception of the lovely strangers. Carline made a million inquiries about a million trifling things ; she considered herself as now entering upon the world, where she hoped to distinguish herself with no inconsiderable *eclat*.

At sun-rise they set forward on their journey, and, at the close of the same day, arrived at the gay metropolis of the Spanish dominions.

CHAPTER IX.

As they entered the gates of the city, the Marchioness de Vallorie heaved a sigh of regret for the scenes she had so lately quitted ; Elvira caught the contagious sorrow, and taking her hand, kissed it as a token of sympathy. The Count was thoughtful, but, the enraptured Carline's soul peeped through her sparkling eyes as she gazed with admiration on the various objects for the first time, presented to her view. She fancied herself transported to Paradise, and the fixed smile upon her glowing cheek proclaimed the exultation of her delighted fancy.

Many days passed in receiving the compliments of the most illustrious families in Madrid. The Prince Almanza was the first to welcome their arrival, and to evince, by unremitting assiduities, the gratitude he felt for their past attentions. He remarked, with concern, the visible alteration in the countenance of Elvira, and expressed his earnest wishes that the change of air might restore to her cheek the animated carnation which had been supplanted by the sickly snow-drop.

Her fine form appeared weak and languid ; the tone of her sweet voice was timid and faltering ; the negligence of her dress bespoke an indifference and contempt for universal admiration. In the most brilliant

assemblies she was mournfully pensive, nor could the most magnificent *spectacle* interest or divert her.

Among the females of fashion who engaged the particular attention of the Marchioness de Vallorie, was a Madame Montalba, a woman practised in the various arts of dissimulation, of fascinating manners, lively conversation, and fine accomplishments. The wits of the age borrowed their polish from her society, and the devotees of illustrious rank were instructed by her piety——She was the widow of a man of family, of French extraction, and, though past her fortieth year, possessed many charms, which she knew well how to improve by every assistance that taste could invent, or extravagance procure. At the death of her husband, she found

herself mistress of a fortune sufficient to procure all the elegancies of private life, but Madame Montalba had been accustomed to live in the great world ; retirement was ill suited to her ambition, she sought the society of the illustrious and the learned, and disdained to conform to the sober joys of domestic seclusion. Her parties presented a medley of characters seldom seen collected in one circle. There, the devotee and the libertine ; the gamester and the divine ; the pedant and the witling ; the prude and the coquet ; the flippant girl and the sententious matron, mingled in the variegated vortex of delight and amusement ! Madame Montalba was every thing, to every body. She knew how to adapt her conversation to the humour of her guest : with the lively, she was gay ; with the grave severe ; polite

to all, but particular to none. Her knowledge of life prevented her ever giving offence; and her dignity of manners excluded the possibility of her receiving an insult; in short, Madame Montalba—was—a woman OF THE WORLD!

To the assemblies of this epitome of fashionable life, the Count Vancenza and his amiable family frequently resorted, to contemplate a curious picture of men and manners, presented with all the alluring fascinations of polite society.

Among the circle, the Marquis Petrozi was one of the most conspicuous characters: he was a man of infinite address, and insinuating conversation. His easy and unaffected deportment gained hourly upon the

credulity of the Marchioness, nor were his personal accomplishments lost to the observation of her sprightly daughter.

Time flew upon the pinions of delight ; every moment had its occupation, and every day appeared too short for the completion of their variety of engagements. Carline, whose person, though not regularly beautiful, was singularly pleasing, whose countenance was sensible and animated, whose conversation was lively and unaffected, and whose expectations at the death of the Count Vancenza, supposed to be very considerable, drew about her a numerous train of empty triflers ; while the gentle Elvira attracted only the respectful admiration of the more sedate and enlightened : there was a dignity in her manner,

so blended with feminine softness, that the giddy trembled to approach her, while the grave and the discerning paid homage to her virtues.

The Duke del Vero, upon receiving intelligence of Elvira's arrival at Madrid, immediately repaired thither on the wings of expectation ; for, he hoped that the dissipated group among which she was introduced would so far corrupt the purity of her mind, as to render his gallantries acceptable. He likewise piqued himself not a little upon his popularity amongst women of the most fashionable notoriety in the highest circles. He knew that many a female heart has sacrificed its own happiness at the shrine of vanity, merely for the pleasure of supplanting a detested rival. Fashion had

long proclaimed the Duke her favourite votary, and he trusted, implicitly, that her influence would, with a little perseverance, subdue the stubborn virtue of the beautiful Elvira.

His sudden change of resolution (for his intended tour had been announced in every society, as an event to be lamented by all the promoters of dissipation) occasioned universal joy. Curiosity had opened her thousand eyes to discover the cause of so unexpected a decision ; when the marked attention and extraordinary admiration, excited by the attractions of the fair orphan, decided the opinions, while they provoked the envy of the whole phalanx of female cotemporaries.

A few weeks after their arrival at Madrid, the Prince Almanza, with his accustomed munificence, prepared a splendid tournament for the amusement of the illustrious strangers. The most sumptuous arrangements announced the brilliancy of the intended fete. every thing rare and delightful was provided for the occasion. The nobility who were absent from the metropolis were apprised of the event, and a spirit of emulation diffused itself through every bosom.

The day of splendid festivity, at length arrived. The great square before the palace of Almanza was inclosed with a lofty scaffolding, hung round with green silk, and luxuriantly decorated with festoons of artificial flowers; the benches

were covered with purple cloth, and richly fringed with gold ; the ground was strewed with silvery sand, artfully concealed with leaves of roses and myrtle. The top of the amphitheatre, which remained uncovered to the clear blue sky, was decorated with vases containing burning aromatic gums, whose curling smoke filled the air with delicious perfume. The vaulted arch of heaven re-echoed with the various tones of exquisite harmony, drawn from a variety of instruments by the cunning fingers of the most skilful musicians ; innumerable banners waved gently with the soft summer breezes, fanning the space beneath.—Every thing that could fascinate the eye or enrapture the imagination was scattered round by the luxuriant hand of cultivated taste ; all the beauty of Spain adorn-

ed the circle, dressed in the most splendid habits of the country.

The Marchioness, and her young companions, were admired for their graceful simplicity. Elvira's form gave distinction to a robe of white silk, slightly embroidered with flowers of silver; her hair was confined by a *bandeau* of brilliants, and her lovely eyes shone with tempered lustre, through a black veil of the thinnest texture.

As soon as they entered the amphitheatre, every spectator seemed to gaze with rapture. The Prince Almanza, who was already armed for the rencontre, bowed respectfully, while two of his pages, richly accoutred, conducted them to seats prepared for their reception.

The sound of the trumpet gave the signal for preparation ! Twenty knights in complete armour, and of the most exalted rank, entered the lists. Ten were mounted on milk-white horses, gaily caparisoned ; the other ten on steeds, whose glossy blackness rivalled the raven's wing. Their lances were tipped with polished steel ; their shields with burnished gold ! The combatants could only be distinguished, one from the other, by scarfs of silk of various colours, gracefully thrown across their shoulders.

The onset commenced, the unskilful were soon dismounted, and the victors received the loud applauses of the anxious assembly.

Two only remained to decide the

glory of the day, by single combat. After many vigorous rounds of fierce encounter, the vanquished knight yielded to his opponent, who, instantly throwing off his helmet, presented his scarf at the feet of—Elvira!

It was the Prince Almanza! His exhausted combatant, the Duke del Vero, retired enraged and mortified at the public triumphs of his friend.

Envy instantly displayed its jaundiced countenance round the amphitheatre. The unbounded praises Elvira's beauty had extorted, now sunk into sullen murmurs, and sarcastic smiles. "The Orphan of Vancenza!" buzzed along the crowd; "the Recluse of the Forest!" echoed through the assembly; the Prince scarcely

dared to encounter the sneers and frowns of the enraged females. Elvira stood blushing, full of graces, yet, before the company could disperse, her form had undergone the malicious scrutiny of every woman in the circle.

Carline, who had been delighted with the scene, and scarcely sensible of the adoration of the subtle Petrozi, who was poisoning her ear with the delusions of flattery, now congratulated her friend upon the confirmation of her superior attractions. The fete concluded with a ball in the evening ; where the hand of Almanza completed the triumphs of Elvira.

CHAPTER X.

AMONG the females who paid their homage the next morning, no one was more zealous in her congratulations than Madame Montalba. She now considered Elvira as a valuable acquisition to her society; the men she hoped would be tempted to visit her house, by the charms of her beauty; the women by curiosity, and for the pleasure of mortifying her. The Prince had frequently resisted Madame Montalba's fascinations with a marked degree of contempt; she was delighted with the prospect, she perceived, of gratifying her revenge,

at least one way or the other. "If he is really enamoured of Elvira, and she rejects his passion, I shall enjoy the humiliation his vanity will experience. If, on the contrary, his addresses should prove successful, he will be exposed to eternal ridicule, by so absurd and degrading an alliance." Such were Madame Montalba's reflections ; and, with an heart full of expectation, she prepared her plan of refined artifice, confident of success, and anticipating the delights of future victory.

Elvira received her with her usual politeness, heightened by that bewitching diffidence, which is ever the companion of superior merit. Madame Montalba highly commended the Prince for the brilliant proofs he had given of his prowess and dis-

cernment. The Marquis Petrozi joined in the warmest strains of panegyric ; while the Count Vancenza and his sister silently enjoyed the praises bestowed upon their darling.

Elvira, whose understanding taught her to consider the Prince's attentions as the mere effusions of gallantry, felt little pleasure in the public distinction she had experienced. She knew the enthusiastic ardour that warmed his heart for feats of chivalry, and took little merit to herself for the flattering compliments he had thought fit to bestow.

Parties were formed in every fashionable house in Madrid ; Elvira was constantly solicited to grace the circles with her presence. Some in-

vited her, merely because others did ; and some to have an opportunity of giving a sarcastic opinion of her attractions. If she was grave, they accused her of sullen and haughty reserve ; if gay, of childish levity. If splendidly attired, they thought such magnificence ill became a miserable dependant ; if simplicity of dress gave interest to her beauty, they concluded, that she considered her charms above the addition of art ; if she accepted their invitations, they maliciously observed, how ready she appeared to embrace every opportunity of being seen ; if she modestly declined them, they supposed, that, by making her society rare, her vanity led her to believe, she should enhance its value ! thus malevolence wilfully misinterpreted every part of

her conduct, and envy unceasingly pursued her through the paths of popularity.

Carline, notwithstanding her volatile disposition, began to entertain a sort of capricious partiality for the Marquis Petrozi. The idea of a lover was more delightful to her imagination, than a new garment to a child, or a tale of slander to an antiquated virgin. She knew the Count Vancenza would be particularly cautious with whom he suffered any part of his family to form an alliance; she dreaded his obtaining any knowledge of her having already received the addresses of one, who was almost a stranger; yet she could not suffer the *eclat* of such a conquest to remain unnoticed. She determined to open the secret to Madame Montalba, and

to request her advice in an affair, that deeply interested her vanity, and was not totally indifferent to her heart.

Madame Montalba, who had long entertained a partiality for Petrozi, was wounded to the soul by the discovery of his passion for another ; at any rate, she knew that a marriage would for ever deprive her of his attentions : but she was not without hopes that Carline's severity and reserve would, in time, erase the impression made upon the heart of her inconstant. With this idea, " My sweet little friend," said she, " I advise you by all means, to conceal this business from the Count Vancenza, till you have more convincing proofs of the Marquiss's attachment : a young woman should be particularly cautious how she discovers the de-

claration of her lover. Men, in general, are only constant as long as the mystery of an attachment renders it a source of perpetual curiosity. It is not the possession of the heart they aim at, but the mere reputation of overcoming the difficulties of conquest. If you publish to the world that the Marquis is your slave, he will think it absolutely necessary to convince mankind that your chains are easily broken. Should your generosity tempt you to confess a partiality for him, you will leave him nothing to solicit that can gratify his vanity. A lover should be perpetually employed ; he should have every thing to fear, and very little to hope ; take from him the necessity of constant assiduity, and he will soon lose the wish to please. Security is the poison of love ; the

little god, if suffered to be conscious of possessing wings, will never rest till he has tried their strength, and if once permitted to soar from the shackles of allurements, he never will return, except to reproach his tyrant for past inhumanity.

“ Every thing that lives delights in liberty, except the lover ; like the feathered warbler, who, long confined, sings contentedly in his wiry habitation, he enjoys his slavery : give him his freedom, and he roves a miserable wanderer, seeking new pleasures and new chains ; nor does he recover his wonted felicity till he is again fascinated by the spells of female enchantment.—If we have no object to please, we soon lose the desire of appearing amiable. If you would secure the affections of your

lover, teach him to deserve you by a proper respect for your own attractions, and be assured, that the instant he ceases to dread the possibility of losing you, you will have no further claims upon his constancy or affection.

“ Why do we often see the assiduous and doating lover metamorphosed into the churlish and splenetic husband ? Not because the object of his passion becomes less amiable or desirable. Why does he spurn from him the kind assiduities of social comfort, the attentions of friendship, and the endearing solitudes of affection ? Not because his mind is incapable of enjoying their delights, but that the heart, gratified in every wish, has nothing more to hope for. The appetite palls upon

a banquet of unvarying sweets ; and when we repine at the fluctuations of fortune, and the little vicissitudes of the world, we are guilty of injustice towards Heaven.

“ Existence derives its supremest bliss from those enjoyments that become exquisite, by a comparison with the ills of life. He, who has never felt the cravings of hunger, cannot taste the blessings of a plentiful repast. The very air we breathe becomes congenial to our natures, from the various changes of revolving seasons :—eternal sunshine would be as insupportable as perpetual frost ; and we have seen many instances of philosophy under the most trying calamities ; though few minds are strong enough to re-

sist the dangerous dissipations of prosperity."

"Then, according to your doctrine," replied Carline, "we ought to wish for the ills of life, rather than for the enjoyments."—"They equally depend," rejoined Madame Montalba, "upon the disposition in which we receive them; happiness is within the power of every human being, and it remains only with the peevish and discontented to render this world a scene of endless anxiety." The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the Marquis Petrozi, whose visit at that moment could have been easily dispensed with. But Madame Montalba was a complete mistress of her feelings; she saluted him with perfect *nonchalance*, and smiling upon Carline,

who was rather disconcerted by his presence, said, in a tone of affected languor, " My dear Marquis, you are entitled to our best thanks for dissipating our *ennui* by your delightful society ; we were engaged in a long conversation, in which I was giving my little friend a sketch of fashionable life ; not with the pencil of a flatterer, I assure you ; the follies and vices of the world were represented in the most striking colours, and I am sorry to say, the dark shades cast such a gloom over the few faint traits of excellence, that the picture was no very favourable one to the eye of a novice. As for myself, I am so thoroughly disgusted with the perpetual insipidity of pleasure, that I begin to think there is no real happiness but in total seclusion. Men are so capricious, and women

such coquettes, that it is impossible to depend upon the sincerity of either."

"You are now making an unjustifiable attack upon our sex at least," replied the Marquis, "and I absolutely protest against so splenetic a judge. I readily grant, that the follies of both sexes afford an ample field for ridicule and reformation, but the eye of sarcastic severity darkens every object it examines, and prejudice will ever possess the power of adding or diminishing virtues, according as inclination prompts, and self-interest dictates. But I am astonished to hear you complain! you, who have every gratification that fashion and admiration can bestow! You are like the sentimental coquette, who is perpetually contemning those very plea-

sures, in the pursuit of which her whole life is wasted : if you will buzz about the flame, how can you be surprised that your wings are now and then scorched by its heat ? Trust me, Madame Montalba, the wisest proof we can give of disgust is to fly from the objects that offend us ; you may find fault, and repine, and fret, and endeavour to reform the follies of mankind, but you will gain little credit from the discerning part of the world, while your theory and practice are so entirely opposite. For my part, I could no more exist out of the exhilarating sphere of fashion, than in the cell of an Anchorite ; let the torpid monk freeze over his reliques, till his heart congeals to stone : I had rather glow with the celestial fire, darting from eyes that I HAVE SEEN," looking to-

wards Carline, "than possess the most valued remains of any Saint in the Calendar."—"Sancta Maria!" exclaimed Madame Montalba, raising hereyes towards Heaven with a look of devotion, while Carline silently joined in the ejaculation. The Marquis affected to laugh heartily at them both, when a servant announced the Marchioness de Vallorie and Elvira.

Madame Montalba, though she had too much *amour propre* to discover her chagrin at the inconstancy of Petrozi, could not help feeling the danger which threatened her, of losing so valuable an associate; she instantly employed her busy and fertile imagination, in forming a plan for the recovery of that power, which she knew was not to be sacrificed without infinite prejudice to her

finances. Jealousy, delicately awakened, often reclaims the heart, that neither beauty or merit had sufficient magic to retain : the mortification of beholding an admired object in the possession of another, rekindles every latent spark of affection ; and if the soul is capable of harbouring one *tender* or *proud* sensation, it seldom fails to discover its inquietude, at the bare semblance of a rival. With this idea, Madame Montalba selected the Prince Almanza, as the most likely person to awaken the feelings of Petrozi, and she determined to lose no time in making the experiment.

The arrival of the Marchioness and Elvira presented a glorious opportunity. After complimenting the latter on the universal admira-

tion she excited in the most fashionable circles, "I should be jealous," said she, "of the fine things I have heard the Prince Almanza say of you, if I did not feel that he really is so engaging, and so accomplished, that to engross his *entire* attention would be a barbarous monopoly, which no reasonable woman would be guilty of."

"The Prince appears to be perfectly amiable," replied the Marchioness de Vallorie.

"O, yes ;" rejoined Madame Montalba, "there are few women of any consequence in the higher societies of Madrid, who will not confess his bewitching qualifications:—for my part, I candidly own he is a mirror

of perfection, that presents a finished model for his own sex, and a seducing image of attraction to ours."

Elvira listened attentively to the encomiums bestowed upon the Prince, and her beating heart but too forcibly proclaimed her secret acknowledgments of their justice. From the very animated tone in which Madame Montalba delivered her sentiments, and the confidence of her manner, Elvira concluded that she had now discovered the happy idol of Almanza's adoration, described by the Duke Del Vero at the cottage of Ursiline.

Petrozi, whose vanity was piqued at the conduct of Madame Montalba, determined on his part to persevere in his designs upon Carline, thereby

opening at once a luxuriant prospect of revenge and gratification.

Elvira, notwithstanding the gentleness of her disposition, could not conduct herself towards Madame Montalba with her usual attentive politeness; she avoided her society as much as possible, and if by chance they met, the interviews were cold, and ceremonious. There is a natural mistrustful timidity in the female heart, even though it possesses every exquisite and refined qualification, that makes it, if it *really loves*, throb at the very shadow of a rival: she, who has never experienced the truth of this observation, is either more or less than woman.

There is no passion so generally misnamed, and misunderstood, as

that of *jealousy* ; it is common to remark, that one man is jealous of another's fame ; or one woman jealous of another's beauty and accomplishments ; when the selfish mind stoops to examine the perfections of human nature with a malevolent and depreciating eye ; eager to condemn, and industrious to disapprove, it is not actuated by *jealousy*, but ENVY, the meanest and most contemptible of all passions.

Jealousy is the offspring and constant companion of LOVE ; it rushes with resistless impetuosity through all the heated mazes of the brain, withering the gentle blossoms of reason and confidence. Caprice, vanity, interest, even *habit* and convenience, have been known to establish a sort of union between individuals,

“joined, not matched;” such attachments may exist without jealousy :—but *Love*, that proceeds from refined congeniality of sentiment ; the glow of ardent affection ; the tenderness of sympathy, that thrills through the soul, and blends all its faculties with those of a dear *second-self*, that knows no delight but that of participating every pang, of alleviating every sorrow, is “ trem- blingly alive” to all the horrid attacks of jealous inquietude.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER the compliments of the day had been exchanged on all sides, they divided, and play being proposed, each party arranged their table for those games to which they gave the preference. Elvira only declining the amusesement, rather preferring the silent pleasure of decyphering the minds, and observing the various pursuits of the motley group, which, by that time, was considerably augmented.

Madame Montalba, who knew the *arcanum* of the *facon de plaire*, had

arranged the tables exactly as the company wished to have them. The Marquis Petrozi and Carline were placed at the chess-board, while the Marchioness de Vallorie and herself were seated with the Count Vancenza and the Duke del Vero at quadrille. The Prince Almanza, who was now arrived, enjoyed the delightful conversation of Elvira, and and all parties seemed perfectly satisfied with the occupation in which they were engaged.

The Marquis let no opportunity escape of insinuating himself into the good opinion of his lively partner. He was content to yield the palm of victory to his lovely antagonist, though she was a mere novice, and himself an adept. She won several games with ease, and

was delighted with her triumphs. The Count Vancenza, who had now finished his party, and in his youthful days had been esteemed extremely skilful at the game, took the field against the vanquished Marquis. At first the prospect was favourable to the Count, who, conceiving his superiority over the Marquis, was less attentive to his moves than prudence should have dictated. Perceiving his wily partner taking every unworthy advantage of his inattention, the warmth of indignation produced a momentary pique, and the unsuspecting Count was induced to augment his stake as far as the sum of six thousand piastres. His skilful opponent *now* thought fit to exert his concealed superiority, and a few minutes decided the contest in favour of Petrozi, to the great amusement

of the most intimate part of the society.

Madame Montalba artfully reprobated the impropriety of such deep play, and gently chid the Count Vancenza for his temerity. The evening's entertainment afforded infinite scope for reflection to the virtuous dupes of the society, and no small degree of exultation to the vicious and successful.

This specimen of Madame Montalba's assemblies, determined the Count Vancenza to deter his family from associating so frequently with such dangerous connections.

In order to ascertain the iniquity of Petrozi, he ventured to make known his conjectures to the Prince

Almanza ; who, smiling at his simplicity, replied——“ I am astonished, my dear Count, at your want of penetration so far as to be the dupe of Petrozi. He is professionally a gamester, and though known to be such, is received at the first houses in Madrid. Such characters are absolutely necessary to support the establishment of Madame Montalba. Her splendid mansion, and luxurious mode of living, find infinite resources in the address of such an ally ; and while her house presents a diverting *melange* of the gay and the grave ; the wise and the unthinking ; the miser and the prodigal ; those who have much to lose, and those who are eager to gain ; morality may preach, and experience evince, the dangers of such society in vain. Madame Montalba is a very extraordinary

character ; she is a devotee, without principle ; a prude, without chastity, and a woman, without jealousy. She varies her humour with the leading sentiments of the hour, while every passion of her mind conforms to the promotion of her interest. Petrozi is her friend, her counsellor, and her lover ; yet Madame Montalba is not only received, but idolized, in the gayest circles, as a prodigy of virtue and propriety, while many women who have not half her vices, but who want the cunning to conceal them, are driven from society."

The Count, astonished at this extraordinary portrait of elevated deformity, forbore to make any comment ; but departing, wrapped in profound reflection, determined in his own mind to profit by the

knowledge experience had taught him.

Elvira, whose melancholy continued to prey upon her heart, received little pleasure in the round of amusements daily proposed for her gratification. Often did she sigh for the shades of Vancenza, and the solitary apartments of the gloomy castle ; but delicacy, lest her repining should have the appearance of ingratitude, prevented her uttering her wishes, which were invariably to return to those scenes of sequestered tranquillity.

In consequence of the Count's having discovered the interior of Madame Montalba's cabinet, and the character of her *Cicisbeo*, the Marquis Petrozi ; the visits of his family be-

came less frequent. The Prince Almanza, whose mind was all perfection, more than once obliquely hinted, that the young ladies would profit by avoiding the counsels and society of such a personage; and the Marchioness de Vallorie heartily coincided in the opinion. The Duke del Vero, who dreaded that the whimsical attractions of Petrozi might make an impression on the mind of Elvira, contributed all the rhetoric he was master of to dissuade the Count from any farther intercourse with the party, solemnly protesting, that his regard for the honour of the family prompted him to interfere upon the occasion.

The Marquis, finding that his designs upon Carline were likely to be frustrated by this unexpected *fracas*,

now turned his thoughts to those stratagems which his easy access to the object of his machinations had hitherto rendered unnecessary: practised in every art that could allure, and possessed of every insinuating qualification that could beguile, his mind required little preparation for the purpose. His apprehensions that the Count would probably return soon to Vancenza, and thereby deprive him of every chance of executing his diabolical scheme, awakened his vigilance, and represented to him the necessity of adopting some immediate plan for success: with this view he opened his mind to Madame Montalba; who filled with resentment for the neglect she had experienced from the family, and hoping to conciliate the esteem of Petrozi, by aiding his wishes for the accomplish-

ment of what she began to consider as a mere *caprice*, immediately became a ready associate in the plan formed for the destruction of their happiness.

With this view she waited on the Marchioness de Vallorie, desiring her company, with her young friends, to a ball given at her house, in celebration of the Carnival ; at the same time requesting that they would honour the event by coming in masquerade, according to the custom of the season.

The Marchioness, whose prudence suggested to her the impropriety of accepting the invitation, was at length over-ruled by the earnest solicitations of her daughter, whose little heart panted to enjoy this new

scene of pleasure and attraction. Elvira, whose dislike towards Madame Montalba hourly increased, gently endeavoured to prevail on Carline to relinquish the entertainment—— but her endeavours proved fruitless.

The evening of visionary delight arrived. The Count, whose generous disposition had not yet learnt the ungracious practice of refusing to confer happiness when it was in his power, was without difficulty prevailed upon to give his consent. The invitation was accepted ; and every preparation made for the display of beauty on one side, and the accomplishment of dissimulation on the other.

CHAPTER XII.

EVERY apartment in Madame Montalba's house was replete with luxuries to charm the eye, and gratify the sense. The Marquis Petrozi, in order to conceal his designs, received the family with a cold reserve, bordering upon rudeness. The venerable Count could not suppress his contempt and indignation ; which, though observed by the Marquis, was passed over at the moment, with the secret gratification of knowing, that he had prepared a poison for his destruction, that would afford him ample revenge.

The Prince Almanza dedicated every moment of the evening to the conversation of Elvira ; his respect, his delicate propriety of manners, convinced her, that if she was not the object of his affections, she enjoyed his esteem in its fullest extent.

The Duke Del Vero, whose jealousy was excited by the amiable complacency of Elvira, endeavoured by smiles and inuendos to mortify her vanity. The recollection of the adventure of the cottage of Ursiline, covered her cheek with blushes. The Duke, taking every unfair advantage of her confusion, superciliously bowing, asked her, “whether she thought the brilliant societies of Madrid, equal to the delightful shades of Vancenza ?” Her resentment occasioned

a look of indignation, which the Prince observing with surprise, said, "surely, amiable Elvira, there was nothing improper in the Duke's question, that could occasion so severe a rebuke." Unable to support this sort of conversation, and supposing the Prince had been informed of her indiscretion, she requested the Marchioness to propose leaving the assembly, at the same time inadvertently expressing her uneasiness at the Duke's persecutions.

The Marchioness communicated the circumstance to the Count Vancenza, who joined with her in an opinion, that this event was a strong confirmation of their former suspicions, respecting the Duke's attachment to Elvira.

The company now began to disperse; the Count, who was disgusted with the frivolous coquetry of one sex, and the laboured hypocrisy of the other, joyfully prepared to depart.

The Marquis Petrozi, who watched like a famished tyger for his prey, followed them to the door; and passing unobserved, took his post at the corner of the street, where two villains, hired for the purpose, waited for his signal to commence their diabolical outrage. A pretended quarrel excited the attention of the few passengers that passed at so late an hour. The Count Vancenza stopped his carriage, and descended to inquire the cause of the encounter. He had no sooner left the females unguarded, than a masked ruffian

seizing upon Carline, tore her from the arms of the Marchioness, and was bearing her off in triumph: her piercing shrieks alarmed the Count; he flew to her assistance, and made a pass at the daring villain: the wretch being wounded, instantly quitted his prize. Carline fell senseless on the pavement; and the deep curses of the base incognito, discovered him to be no other than the Marquis Petrozi!

The Count's sword had slightly penetrated his side, leaving him sufficient strength to turn upon his opponent. His arm, nerved with fresh vigour by the anguish of defeat, rushed forward. The guardian spirit that hovers over unsullied virtue, shrunk with horror at the sight of the

assassin's poignard, while its envenomed point penetrated the bosom of the venerable Vancenza,

The Prince, who had been informed of the tumult, just arrived in time to secure the Marquis. After assisting to bind him, he delivered him into the hands of his domestics, with orders to conduct him instantly to prison.

The unfortunate Count was conveyed home by his distracted family, the Prince kneeling in the carriage, and supporting him with the most tender attention.

At seven o'clock the next morning the Count Vancenza breathed his last sigh! leaving his disconsolate

and unprotected family overwhelmed with the agonies of despair.

An hour previous to the fatal catastrophe, he requested that the Marchioness, Carline, and his beloved Elvira would approach his bedside; after fervently bestowing upon them a thousand benedictions, "*I feel,*" said he, as the last glimmer of the vital lamp shrunk from his fainting eyes, "the near approach of that moment, which is only painful because it separates me from you: I leave you, my children, to the maternal care and affection of my adored sister, and entreat you not to lament too deeply the departure of your old protector, whose age precluded the probability of his long remaining with you." Then, calling for his *scrutoire*, and taking out a small key

of singular workmanship, "This extraordinary piece of mechanism," said he, "is destined for you, Elvira ; I request that you will preserve it as an inestimable treasure ; I know not to what it appertains, but it was the last solemn gift of——" Here his voice faltered, his countenance proclaimed that the cold hand of death had grasped his quivering heart-strings ; he raised his withered hands in silent agony, and closed his eyes
——FOR EVER !

Elvira fell upon his breast in unutterable affliction. The Marchioness was conveyed from the scene of misery in a state of insensibility, attended by her disconsolate daughter.

Elvira clasped the remains of her adored Protector in dumb despair !

bathing his wan cheek with torrents of tears, and fixing her frantic gaze upon the senseless form of him who had been to her a friend ! a father !— At length the horrors of her situation seized upon her shattered brain ; the shriek of convulsive agony awoke her from her lethargy of wo ; to the corroding pangs of unavailing anguish.

Several days passed in the frenzy of affliction. The remains of the noble Vancenza were deposited with his illustrious ancestors, in the church of Saint Isidro, amidst the groans and sighs of a lamenting populace.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Marquis Petrozi, who was committed to the state prison, made use of all the interest he could command to procure some mitigation of the rigorous punishment his crimes demanded from offended Heaven.

Madame Montalba, whose reputation suffered considerably by the baseness of her intimate associate, exerted every trial of the most zealous friendship to check the hand of unerring justice. A message from the police, however, silenced her intercessions, by informing her, that if she persisted in her vain endeavours

to exculpate so atrocious a criminal, she would expose herself to the suspicion of being an accomplice in his villany.

The wretched homicide, now left to the stings of conscious guilt, within the flinty walls of a subterraneous cavern, from which there was not a possibility of escaping, by the sage counsel of his ghostly confessor, dispatched the following letter to the afflicted Marchioness de Vallorie.—

“ With a mind tortured by all the pangs of hopeless misery, and a hand yet crimson with the blood of the virtuous Vancenza, the veriest wretch that ever breathed the contagious vapours of a dungeon, presumes to address you. I do not solicit your pity, or wish to sully the purity of

your heart, by obtruding on its generosity the supplications of despair. The soul, labouring under the pressure of extreme guilt, finds its only solace in the blessed privilege of unveiling its secrets before the throne of Him, who alone can administer comfort.

“ Born to the laborious avocations of rustic obscurity, it may appear singular that my mind, from my earliest infancy, should have been impregnated with the ungovernable propensities of ambition. Before I had reached the age of manhood, traversing the confines of a wood, in which I had lived from the hour of my birth, I was led by the sound of a carriage to the road that opened among the trees. I soon discovered it contained a youth, about seven-

teen years of age, of noble appearance. His countenance bespoke the generosity of his heart, and the singular elegance of his little equipage denoted its owner to be of no mean quality.

“Stopping to rest, for the day was sultry, and the sandy road extremely fatiguing to the mules, I advanced towards the carriage door, and, in a supplicating tone, solicited charity: the young man, from the decent garb I wore, expressed his surprise at my poverty, and graciously inquired to what part of the country I was travelling. I replied, that having neither relations nor friends, I was going in search of employment at the city of Madrid. From the decency of my appearance, the open simplicity of my manners, and my know-

ledge of the Spanish language, the *credulous* youth felt interested in my favour, and, ordering me to seat myself behind his carriage, conveyed me to Madrid. He was an Italian by birth, of an illustrious family, and was making the tour of Spain for pleasure and improvement. He received me into his service, I was trusted with the care of his property, and made the confidant of his most secret thoughts. In a few months we arrived at Naples. His kindness knew no bounds; but, alas! gratitude cannot touch the heart that is hardened by vicious propensities. I will not trouble you with a tedious detail of my detested life. The Marquis Alberto passed frequently many days in making pleasurable excursions upon the sea; I was constantly his only attendant,

except the sailors who conduct the little vessels employed in such expeditions. We sometimes passed over to Sicily, at others confined ourselves to the borders of Vesuvius.

“On a fatal night, when the moon hung her pale crescent on the dappled clouds, when the air was still and the smooth ocean scarcely quivered to the whispering breezes, walking on the deck with my generous patron, the fiends suddenly possessed my soul, and with an arm guided by some unseen power, I pushed him from his balance. I heard his body plunge amidst the waters; and saw, by the faint light, the circle it had made, widening upon the surface of the deep, till it recovered its wonted serenity. Every one on

board believed that the catastrophe had proceeded from accident. I returned that night to Naples, where I secured all the property in money and jewels that I could find. His parents tenderly lamented his loss, and conferred on me a thousand obligations, because I had been the favourite of their son, I left Italy soon after, and proceeded towards Spain, under the assumed title of the Marquis Petrozi. Upon my arrival at Madrid, I was received into the best societies as an illustrious foreigner. Madame Montalba honoured me with her esteem ; and her patronage was a sufficient passport to the highest circles. Here let me draw the veil of oblivion over a life of restless ambition and guilty gratification.—Shame is the constant com-

panion of iniquity ; and the wretch whose depredations pass unnoticed for a few short years, is only spared by the hand of vengeance for the accumulated punishment due to his crimes.

“ For myself I do not ask a single tear of compassion ; but I conjure you to pity the miseries of an aged mother. If Heaven has spared her to drink the bitter potion I have prepared for her, she still remains in the forest of Vancenza, where the cottage of Ursiline has ever been known as the habitation of virtue. To your bounty I recommend her, and earnestly entreat that she may never be informed of the fate of her unfortunate and guilty son,

PHILIP ALBERONI.”

A few days after this letter was written, the criminal was condemned to perpetual imprisonment. Madame Montalba, mortified at the fate of her friend, made a precipitate retreat to a neighbouring country, where she died some years afterwards, unknown and unlamented !

The Castle, and vast domains of Vancenza, now devolved to another family. The late Count, by his munificence and generosity, had so impoverished his private fortune, that he had little to bequeath. The Marchioness de Vallorie offered to share her small independance with her companions in affliction ; and as the new Lord of Vancenza could not demand possession till the expiration of a year, they determined to dedi-

cate that interval to the unceasing
and mournful recollection of their
lost protector.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

